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ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED AND ELDERLY THROUGH ICT

A dissertation submitted to the
Department of Computer Science & Engineering, University of Moratuwa
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Business Administration in Information Technology

by



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DEVANARAYANAGE PRADEEPA SAMARASINGHE

Supervised by: Dr. Lanka Udawatta

**Department of Computer Science & Engineering
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka**

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DECLARATION


The work submitted in this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

It has not already been accepted for any degree, and is also not being concurrently submitted for any other degree.


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I endorse the declaration by the candidate.


Dr. Lanka Udawatta



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Abstract

Underemployment of elderly and people with disabilities costs the economy hundreds of thousands of rupees a year in social welfare, lost earnings and tax revenue. It is an enormous waste of talent and skill. Not only underemployment, but it is a social responsibility to build a strong, inclusive society and secure a high quality life for all Sri Lankans including elderly and differently abled. This means removing barriers so that elderly and differently abled people get the opportunity to contribute to our social and economic fabric through which they can live with dignity and realize their capacity for independence. Employment is a key element of full inclusion of differently abled people. Many elderly persons and persons with disabilities can and want to work, but still face barriers that prevent them from realizing their full potential.

The revolutionary advances of Information Technology and Telecommunications can be made as the driver for this social inclusion. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), opens up great opportunities to improve the quality of life of differently abled and elderly people. Without substantial efforts throughout society, there is a risk that these technical developments will only give us products and services which increase the information gap, especially for the differently abled people. However, if determined efforts are made, ICT can become an effective tool, allowing a greater number of elderly and differently abled people to play a part in society.

The overall aim of this research is to analyze the feasibility of using the advances of ICT in Sri Lanka to enable elderly and differently abled to contribute productively to society and the economy. In this research, two surveys were done focusing on the elderly and differently abled people which analyzes different aspects of ICT literacy. Extensive analyses of these surveys are detailed in this research paper including hypothesis analysis. In addition to these, interviews were held with the key organizations concerned for the differently abled community. All these interviews, data and the survey analyses were taken into account on preparing the Employment Strategy Framework for the differently abled Sri Lankans.

In summary, the analysis of the surveys and the interviews show most of the elders if not for employed elders are not willing to use ICT in their daily life main reason being unawareness of what ICT is and how they can use it. On the other hand most of the differently abled want to use ICT, but were not given the opportunity to learn and train in ICT. The main problems affecting these are not only the accessibility, but the poor organization and planning of the government, employers and other social partners to make the elders and differently abled aware, educate and train to get the maximum benefits through the use of ICT.

The ultimate goal of my research comes to reality once the strategies and the plans I have sketched for the elderly and differently abled segments in this paper is brought forward to implementation. Our Information Society cannot afford to turn its back on any of its citizens. It must take all its' efforts to make use of all the human capital and to allow all citizens to achieve their working ambitions through the use of ICT.

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